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SUBJECT: Goma situation report for December 28-29, 2007

REF: (A) Kinshasa 1423

Note: The following report was provided by Embassy Kinshasa's political officer in Goma. End note.

¶1. (U) The subject line in ref (A), the most recent report in this series, is incorrect. Subject line should read: "Goma situation report for December 27 (not December 22), 2007." This is the last report for 2007; reports will resume January 2, 2008.

Conference Update  
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¶2. (SBU) Father Apollinaire Muholongu Malumalu, one of the four speakers at yesterday's convocation ceremony, had breakfast with the EU representative and embassy's officer in Goma January 28. At the breakfast Malumalu stated that Nkunda will not be present at the Conference but will send eight representatives. Malumalu also requested Tim Shortley's presence as an outside participant to augment that of the other two special envoys who will reportedly attend, Joseph Smets (Belgium) and Roland Van der Geer (European Union). Malumalu would also like to see groups such as the International Crisis Group (ICG) and the Carter Center participate as conferees as well. Malumalu requested that the U.S. contact FDLR and NALU contacts in the Grand North to inform they are not invited to the Conference although they are welcome to pass messages to the Conference through interlocutors. Embassy officer in Goma conveyed this message to Embassy Kinshasa.

¶3. (SBU) Latest reports indicate that 'civil-society' is posing a problem for conference organizers. NGO's continue to press for more delegates than they are allotted. Besides having a greater voice in the conference, each delegate will reportedly receive a \$200 daily stipend for lodging and food, undoubtedly a factor in the high demand for Conference participation.

Prepcom is in full swing  
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¶4. (SBU) December 27 opening ceremony included speeches from the interim governor of South Kivu (FNU LNU) which was reportedly ill-prepared and poorly received. Things picked up with the speech by Governor Paluku of North Kivu, followed by the Fr. Malumalu and the President of the National Assembly, Vital Kamerhe. Also seen (and greeted by Embassy officer in Goma) was General Mayala, commander of the 8th Military Region, as well as the DRC Ambassador to the United States, Faida Mitifu. Ambassador Mitifu apologized for not visiting the U.S. embassy in Kinshasa, as she not have time to do so due to the quick pace of recent events. She plans to visit the embassy when she passes back through Kinshasa.

## Security Situation

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¶5. (SBU) The situation on the ground between the FARDC and Nkunda has been fairly quiet in the past three days with minor skirmishes initiated by the FARDC in Rutshuru territory last reported two days ago. MONUC now officially considers the roads from Goma to Sake as safe to traverse. Nkunda already controls the roads to Rutshuru and Kiroilirwe. According to some reports, this explains why Goma residents have seen a 50 percent rise in the cost of nearly all staple products, such as beans, bananas, etc.). Were Nkunda able to cut the road at Masisi, he would control all three points of access to Goma, leaving the city in a stranglehold. FARDC and MONUC apparently realize this and are moving to reinforce Masisi to counter the threat. The FARDC is sending an estimated 600 troops to reinforce Masisi. MONUC is providing air transport for at least 240 of them. Those awaiting transport can be seen on the southeast side of the Goma airfield.

¶6. (SBU) A MONUC transport helicopter crash landed recently west of Sake in disputed territory. All crew and passengers safely returned home, though the aircraft was reportedly looted. One eyewitness reports observing the damaged aircraft carried back to Goma by a larger transport helicopter yesterday. One MONUC source states that Nkunda's forces were the first on the scene and made every effort to speed the injured to safety. Shortly afterward, FDLR and PARECO soldiers arrived at the scene and the source believes that these forces would have harmed, rather than helped the crew and passengers.

## Civilian life in Goma

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¶7. (SBU) Within the city of Goma, life goes on. As mentioned earlier, prices have increased markedly due to the informal "taxes" and roadblocks along the three major routes into and out of Goma. There continue to be reports of theft, rape, and murder, but residents have come to live with this. Some believe that such crimes have become so commonplace that they are attributable to simple "jealousy." As one story goes, if a miscreant feels his rival has something he would like (money, a woman, or a valuable such as a television), he will attempt to kill or rob the rival. The weapon of choice is the AK-47 assault rifle. Streets are crowded with people all day and into the early evening (8:00 - 9:00 pm). Select shops remain open later into the night.

## More on the Conference

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¶8. At least one major hotelier claims he was not informed of conference details, to include the new dates and estimated number of attendees. Even with the possibility of an influx of 2000 plus people in Goma, this hotel manager believes that there will be enough hotel rooms to accommodate the conferees. He believes that many will find rooms in town at friend's and acquaintance's homes, or rent one of the many newly constructed homes. Furthermore, he is concerned that many of the conferees will stay one or two nights and then check out after they find other, less expensive accommodations, so that they can save as much of their per diem as possible.

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